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ABSTRACT

Rural and economic development efforts are inadequate responses to changing rural conditions. They fail because they are often top-down driven and few influential people are involved. Minnesota's Project Future is designed to help distressed communities take charge of their own direction. Developed on the principle of collective empowerment, this coordinated, interdisciplinary education, research, and technical service aids communities in looking to the future and implementing a community-based plan for renewal. Anticipatory management, future studies, civic education, behavior modification, and economic development coalesce in the program. In the project's four steps, (1) the community defines itself and citizen members choose to renew the community; (2) people of the community are engaged; (3) citizens participate in problem solving; and (4) self-renewal is continued. Results of the experience with five pilot sites in 1988 indicate that local residents are more active in community issues, more positive about the future, and more aware of community problems. The role of the adult educator in this process should be that of a change agent and advisor. He/she must be committed to long-term nurturing for community empowerment and community problem solving. Adult educators need to be futurists. (Sample program materials are appended.) (YLB)

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WHY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ENOUGH: NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO ASSIST DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES

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WHY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ENOUGH

SITUATION: NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO ASSIST DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES

During the last decade, the residents of cities, counties and school districts, particularly rural residents, have faced a series of continuing challenges. These challenges have resulted from such external forces as technology changes, international economic competition, shifts in energy costs and availability, limitations on government revenues, climatic changes and continued concentration of populations and economics resources in urban areas. A cumulative effect within Minnesota communities, especially those which are natural resource based, has been to disrupt the stability and predictability of life within these communities. The terms rural crisis and farm crisis were used to describe this condition which still exists today.

This paper will address the inadequacies of economic development programs as a response to these changing conditions, will introduce Project Future, a community self-renewal program, will highlight the technique of creating comprehensive "community of the future" visions as a guide for community action, and will close with a discussion of the adult educator's role in this process.

As population shifts occurred to urban centers in response to economic and social changes, many communities lost the critical mass of people necessary to maintain their own school systems, health services, business districts, community organizations and in some cases even their volunteer fire departments. In addition, the life styles of many community residents changed. Two income families and single parent families increasing in

numbers having a corresponding growing need for available and affordable child care services. Time availability for volunteer efforts has, in many cases, lessened accordingly.

Support from state elected officials and the private foundation community for these changes has been substantial for several years. For example, the State of Minnesota provides both technical assistance and funding for communities undertaking economic development programs. Four major foundations have programs directed at rural economic development. Extensive state funded efforts in research and the development of new industries are being carried out through the legislatively authorized Greater Minnesota Corporation and Rural Development Board. The Minnesota State Department of Education offers consulting assistance to school districts facing potential consolidation and recently financially aided some districts in consolidating on a "pilot" basis.

These programs focus on one aspect of the community, which in the 1980's has tended to be predominately economic development. The limitations for such efforts are:

1. Not all economic development efforts are successful or they take several years to achieve the desired results. In the meantime, the lack of attention to other needed community improvements, such as those needed in health and human services or education, may actually lessen a community's economic development opportunities.

   Successful communities which can regularly improve and update themselves in all areas of community life enhance their potential opportunities for economic growth. Such communities build a "track record" of accomplishment and can create a community "quality of life" that becomes a strong asset in business development.

2. It cannot be assumed that communities of the past are still communities today. Many communities which in the past could provide the majority of the social, economic and educational needs of their residents can no longer do so. New communities on a wider geographic scale are coming about formally or informally. Economic development really needs to be focused at these "new" communities to which people will commit time and effort.

3. A sense of community which involves common feelings of solidarity, identity and belonging among citizens is necessary before community improvement takes place. Sometimes this community sense has to be redefined or rebuilt prior to communities being able to improve themselves.

4. Communities are complex, many faceted, and ongoing in nature. Yet, government agencies often divide up their service responsibilities to community residents without regard for the full community setting. It is citizens who must find ways of working with and improving the complete community.

Many studies have documented failed rural and economic development efforts. While there are many reasons for failure, two reasons stand out. One is that rural development efforts are often top-down driven. The efforts plan and direct what the community should do, rather than help individuals succeed with their own initiatives. Another common reason cited for failure is that only a few influential people are involved. This is problematic because decisions made may not be supported by the community and those individuals involved may become "burned out". Economic development alone can be exploitive and divisive.

While there are many theories about what is wrong with rural America and what might be useful in fixing it, one stands out (Heartland Center for Leadership Development, 1987; Heiferz and Sinder, 1988; Wilkinson, 1987). As Wilkinson (1987) states, "The problem is a community problem and the answer

can be found in the process of community development." Michael Cernea has outlined a perspective on Third World development that he calls "Putting People First" (Cernea, 1984). The basic idea is the use of human needs and human capacities as the basic building blocks of a planned rural development program. Putting people first is consistent with the "human development" approach in development economics, but it has a broader meaning. It is also consistent with the use of a needs assessment as a planning tool in research and extension, but it is broader than that. According to Cernea, putting people first actually means putting people up front, in the driver's seat. It is a philosophy of empowerment, or more precisely, a philosophy of capacity building.

Wilkinson (1987) summarizes the important transition from human capacity building to collective empowerment.

> Without denying the usefulness of policies and programs that help people develop their skills and take advantage of opportunities as individuals, one can see easily that the greater usefulness of this concept of putting people first is in community development. Community development is the process of building self-help capacity among people. In community development, an aggregation of people who happen to share a territory become an integral unit for self-help (p.13).

Putting people first in this context would mean designing community development as the rationale for a rural development policy and as the justification and focus of the investments in rural economic development. It means helping people organize for community action and providing development assistance with community level impacts and processes in mind.

PROJECT FUTURE: A NEW PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE

"We're glad Project Future is more than just another economic development program", said an Ellendale, Minnesota business owner. Developed on the principle of collective empowerment, a common sense approach has been initiated to help distressed communities take charge of their own direction. This coordinated, interdisciplinary educational, research and technical service is called Project Future: Building Community Through People. The University of Minnesota Extension Service has designed this program to help communities look to the future and implement a community-based plan for renewal. This program offers a four step framework which calls for citizens to take a comprehensive, community-wide, long-term approach to community self-renewal. Anticipatory management, future studies, civic education, behavior modification, and economic development come together in the program. Unique characteristics of Project Future are that it is:

- Citizen driven: this program is under the direction of the community, not an agency or institution. It is a voluntary program which requires an ongoing supply of community leaders to operate the program.
- Based on broad participation: the goal is to expand the leadership base in a community by involving at least 50% of the citizens in community futuring and action projects.
- Future focused: citizens learn to anticipate change and plan for their future.
- Comprehensive, holistic integrated approach: it takes short-term projects with long term goals to improve all areas of community life. This can include recreational, health, economic,

and educational programs.

- Long term: the program is not a "quick fix" approach, rather it recognizes the long term nature and commitment needed in community self-renewal.
- Action oriented: not just a strategic planning process, the program emphasizes thoughtful planning with an action bias.

A theme that runs through the program effort is that of community leadership--community empowerment and community capacity building.

Definition of Community

Typically community is defined geographically. However, for Project Future the specific definition of community is left to those initiating the effort. It is recognized that community can be residents of a neighborhood, school district, town, city, township, county or group of counties. It can also be a group of people who share a common important interest: members of industry groups, youth organizations, small business owners, retired people or health care consumers. Community as used in Project Future means those groups which share a common identity, feeling of solidarity and belonging, and are willing to volunteer on behalf of the community.

Four Stage Process

Step 1. **The Community Defining Itself and Citizen Members Choosing to Renew the Community.**

It cannot be assumed that a sense of belonging--common identity and solidarity, exists particularly if community is defined as the residents of a political subdivision. It may exist on a wider or narrower basis, or it may

not exist at all. If a sense of community does not exist, or cannot be created or revitalized, it is difficult for sustained community improvement to take place.

Community is what community leaders and concerned citizens talk about at "sense of community" and "stakeholder" meetings. Out of these early meetings, volunteers either step forward to direct the Project Future program or the program doesn't happen. The voluntary nature of the program is essential for local ownership and citizen commitment. Volunteers are organized into a steering committee, membership on which is described as, "The most challenging and demanding community volunteer experience you will ever have."

Step 2. **Engaging the People of the Community**

Engagement means serious talk about the current community, and more importantly, about the preferred community vision of the year 2010. The steering committee, trained by the University Cooperative Extension staff, attempt to have at least 50% of the community participating in this futuring discussion which is done in a variety of ways:

- at meetings of civic organizations
- at special town meetings
- in classrooms or youth organization meetings
- on a one-to-one basis, often with youth interviewing adults

Out of engagement comes a "community of the future" vision--upon which there is community consensus, and from which action projects can be developed. In Silver Bay, one of the Project Future pilot sites, a city council member remarked after seeing the utility of such a process, "We have lots of good

ideas around here. However, we can never get more than three people to agree on them, so nothing gets done."

Because the "community of the future" visions are the power pieces which propel subsequent community decision making, direction setting and action, as well as citizen ownership and involvement of that direction, much attention has been devoted to developing and testing processes and tools to build citizen perspective and stimulate discussion about the current situation and desired futures. To assist with perspective-building, a statewide computer information system provides baseline data from census and other governmental sources for use by counties and communities. Group analysis techniques are used to develop future visions which generate belief in the community's ability to achieve their desired future. (Refer to the appendix of this paper for a selected community-focused, citizen-lead futuring training guide and sample "community of the future" visions).

Step 3. **Citizen Problem Solving**

Another group of community volunteers are those who serve on five to ten member action teams appointed by the steering committee to undertake priority community improvement projects. Citizen action teams can be appointed to work on whatever will contribute to a community reaching its future visions. A detailed work plan is developed following the adoption of the community vision statement.

Citizen action in Ellendale, Minnesota meant responding to the loss of a long-time community newspaper. In four weeks, an "action team" was producing Community News, as a replacement for The Ellendale Eagle. In Silver Bay, Minnesota, an action team went door to door to update census and labor market

information. The survey results will be used to help plan a diversified Silver Bay economy. This was needed because the area's principle employer shut down, eliminating the majority of jobs in the community.

These action teams, as well as all others, have access to University of Minnesota faculty and research that support their projects. For example, the Silver Bay survey was conducted under the direction of a University rural sociologist. Economics faculty lead an Ellendale action team in a community economic study.

Step 4. **Continuing Self-Renewal**

Since communities never get fixed "once and for all" there has to be continuous thinking, discussion, consensus building and action. This final involvement of the project is to assist communities in creating an ongoing citizen-based organization to continue to engage people, revisit and update the community vision, and appoint "new" action teams as needed.

Implementation

Through a selection process, five diverse communities--three cities, ranging in population from 2300 to 560, and two counties--served as Project Future pilots during 1988. Twenty additional communities will be added in 1989. Based on the experience with the pilots sites, the criteria for selection of the additional projects include:

a) the existence of "genuine" citizen interest in a long-term approach to community improvement

b) the "special needs" of a community

c) strategic opportunities within a community that assist current

efforts or utilize a community problem situation

d) the degree to which the local boards of county commissioners are supportive of undertaking community development work through Project Future

e) characteristics of the local extension agent team, that is,

--their belief in and commitment to citizen improvement,

--demonstrated cooperative working relationship,

--optimistic, open minded approach to behavior change and belief in the ability of people and communities to guide their futures

--skills or interest in community development and citizen eduction

Results

In an article entitled "The Magnificent Six," The Farmer magazine (Moraczewski, 1988) reported that the magnificent experiment (Project Future) designed to improve rural communities is starting to pay off. The Minnesota community of Ellendale sponsored a community festival. A resource survey, done with the help of inspired high school students, was conducted in Jackson County; in Silver Bay, Extension is helping emerging leaders change a "company town gone bust" to a vibrant community; a Sibley County project has looked ahead twenty five years (What crops will you grow in 2013?) to start their planning.

Evaluations from the pilot phase have shown that through the four steps of Project Future: defining the community, identifying the future vision through community engagement, organizing action teams and continuing community self-renewal, citizens are constantly challenged to take on the future of their community. By "taking on the future":

- A new and expanded leadership base is developed through steering committees, action teams and supporting leadership development program for both adults and youth.
- "Community of the Future" visions are created which have broad based community support.
- Improvement actions, through citizen action teams, have been initiated to move toward the long-term vision.
- The communities have access to land grant university as a resource. In addition, other public, private and non-profit resources are sought out on behalf of the community.

The surveys of 353 people further indicated that local residents are more active in community issues than they were one year earlier and are also attempting to work together to solve community problems. Local residents report that they are more positive about the future and are more aware of local problems and believe they can better solve community problems.

ROLE OF THE ADULT EDUCATOR

Whereas education, as a process in support of community development and social change, has a long and respectable history in adult education literature and practice, (Lindeman, 1961, McClusky 1960, Stubblefield, 1981), there is a discrepancy between what is advocated hypothetically and what actually occurs. Boggs (1986) cites two discrepancies. One, that the purposes of adult education have come to be defined largely in terms of meeting the needs of the individual, not groups. Two, is that contemporary

adult education has adopted an essentially apolitical and noncontroversial stance.

Differences between an economic development approach and a community development approach to assist struggling communities parallels the differences in possible roles for adult educators. Project Future provides evidence to support a community development approach. It also suggests a broadening of the educator's role from information disseminator (or provider of technical assistance) or trainer, to change agent (and in some cases the catalyst of that change) and advisor. Further it suggests challenging the discrepancies described by Boggs.

Adult educators need to recognize that they can no longer be known for providing information and answers. In today's world, particularly when dealing with complex problems, there are no right or wrong answers and the search for the truth becomes less relevant. Instead, adult educators, need to be known for helping to define and illuminate problems, for helping to compare choices and options, for helping provide a process of problem-solving, for helping individuals and groups "discover" alternatives and for expanding the perspective of persons who must make important decisions.

In a classic 1969 work, Reflections On Community Development Education, Bennett (1986) points out the dilemma of being an information giver (expert) or helper in problem solving. That traditional quandary is over. The new challenge, as just described, is that an education must be able over a period of time to guide the development of the critical analytical skills and future outlook required for citizen directed community development.

Therefore, role of the community development adult educator does not entail being a resource who "blows in, blows off and blows out." For today's

issues and concerns that view is far too simplistic and too ineffective. The adult educator must be committed to long-term nurturing for community empowerment and community problem solving. The role involves extended work in building local learner capacity in critical thinking, resource acquisition, and problem solving. Then, it involves being a quiet local advisor orchestrating and supporting behind the scenes.

Adult educators needs to see community and community groups as a legitimate audience, just as individuals, families or businesses have been. Finally, adult educators need to be futurists. Change is occurring so rapidly; basing future directions or programming on straight line trend focusing/extrapolation has limitations. In so many aspects of individual and community life, the past is no longer the best predictor of the future. To respond to the issues of today and to be positioned to create the future tomorrow, adult educators, possessing a futures way-of-thinking, can be instrumental in leading and integrating future-focused, comprehensive community development.

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APPENDIX

CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE "COMMUNITY OF THE FUTURE" VISION

1. Identify or develop a community organization with interest in all aspects of the community to perform or direct the community vision process.

2. Define the purpose for the community vision.
   a. Illustration purposes - challenge peoples thinking
   b. Develop a shared vision from which committed persons can "take action"

   If b. is the purpose, then a significant portion or persons affected by the new community vision must be involved in its creation.

3. BROADEN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PERSONS CREATING THE VISION BY ASSISTING THEM IN IDENTIFYING:
   a. Forces - from both inside and outside the community which are impacting on the community
   b. Trends in the community
   c. Strengths and weaknesses of the community

4. ENGAGE CITIZENS IN A CREATIVE BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON THE FEATURES OF LIFE IN THEIR COMMUNITY IN THE YEAR 2010 OR 2000.

5. COMBINE THE RESULTS OF THESE SESSIONS IN A 2 OR 4 PAGE "script" of life in the future community. Publicize and distribute widely.

6. CONDUCT REACTION AND DISCUSSION MEETINGS - modify and reshape "community vision" to reflect consensus.

7. (IF VISION IS for "action") ORGANIZE ACTION PROJECTS THAT WILL HELP REACH VISION.

PROJECT FUTURE

Building Community Through People

October 21, 1988

Translating the Results of Engagement Meetings Into a Community Vision

The conducting of engagement meetings with community organizations will typically produce the following products:

*listings of community strengths and weaknesses (or sometimes they are called assets and areas of needed improvement).

*listings of features, characteristics or suggestions for the community of the future.

*a 2-4 page COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT.

In some engagement meetings, sufficient time may be available to also identify the driving forces affecting the community as well as current community trends. However, the primary engagement outcome is expected to be a COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT from which specific improvement projects can be organized.

...definition...

COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT = a description of the lifestyle and features or characteristics of a future community with illustrations of change, examples of what has been retained from the past and a "sampling" of some of the events or trends which helped create this future community.

A Community Vision Statement must be:

*understandable

*have a rationale behind it (which is apparent to the reader)

*represent a mixture of common sense and aspiration

*relate to the overall world of the future

*be viewed as attainable with a concentrated positive effort by the community

The following process (A-K) can be used by a committee to develop a vision statement. At all times, the committee should be respectful of citizen suggestions, and willing to undertake additional engagement activities to provide the basis for a comprehensive community vision.

A. Sort engagement description of community or the future features under the following headings.

1. COMMUNITY LIFE STYLE

   a. Developing, "growing", learning as an individual (it's more than formal education).

   b. Developing and "growing" as a family or group.

   c. Expressing talents and interests (sports-recreation-arts-culture.

   d. Expressing values and spiritual dimensions.

   e. Joining with others in formal and informal groups.

   f. Alternatives and options available to residents in all aspects of life.

   g. Interaction with the neutral environment.

   h. Sense of community - community spirit.

2. COMMUNITY POSITION IN THE WORLD

   a. Community image and reputation.

   b. "Niche" or special position of community on local, regional, and statewide basis.

   c. Community uniqueness - in any form.

   d. Community relationships

      1. with other communities

      2. With other levels of government

   e. Community relationship to natural environment

3. EVIDENCE OF CHANGE IN COMMUNITY AND WHY! (For example, has change developed from a community strength(s) or corrected a community weakness?)

   a. Physical features

   b. Use of technology

   c. Diversity of the economy

   d. Physical/natural environment

   e. Attitudes among people

   f. Relationships between people

   g. Number and age distribution of people

4. ONGOING ATTENTION TO CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT

   a. Community leadership.

   b. Citizen involvement.

   c. Type of local government involvement in future planning.

   d. Community attitude toward change.

   e. Community attitude toward progress improvement - the future.

   f. Youth attitude toward an involvement with community and remaining in community.

B. Identify community features which appear to be contradictory and discuss. By group consensus, indicate where <u>one feature has to be selected over another because they cannot simultaneous exist.</u>

C. Identify causes or change of reasons why community features came about. This will prove valuable in describing the changes and help to bridge the gap between "what is" today and "what will be" in the future.

D. Expand the list of community of the future features to include what could be extrapolated from other described feature or "what would follow from" or "what would have to take place first before the desired feature could come about". For example, if certain type of shopping facilities are desired, then what critical mass of people need to be present to support that shopping?

E. What are the most significant changes from the current community that are identified in the "community of the future"?

F. What community of the future features appear to have the most consensus among resident (have appeared the most times in engagement discussions).

G. What community of the future features are continuation of today's features? Would they occur in the same way as in the past or in a different form which needs to be described within the vision statement?

H. Do qualitative judgments of a community feature need to be further described - perhaps by illustration? (what is a "good" school system or "strong" family life or a "stable economy"?)

I. Did engagement participants adequately address all areas of community life? If not, what additional topics should be discussed and by what groups?

J. Drafting a community vision for discussion purposes (Attention getting - illustrate change - "jolt" --provide reassurance, - build confidence - foster "more" creative thought).

1. Is there an overall theme to the community of the future which can be used in the early part of the description to capture attention?
2. Are there words or phrases in the community of the future relating to IMAGE-REPUTATION-UNIQUENESS which would be attention getting?
3. What lifestyle descriptions would ILLUSTRATE daily life in the "community of the future"? (could these be presented in the form of "skits" or short plays?).
4. What description of change and lifestyle would potentially JOLT readers to realize that change forces WILL AFFECT their community whether people want them to or not?
5. For what change does some type of CASUAL factor need to be described to make the change seem possible.
6. What wording should be used to indicate continuity with todays community and reassurance that the good aspects of today will be carried forward into tomorrow's community?

K. VISION DIMENSIONS - For printed materials

2-4 pages

Highly readable for students as well as adults. Primarily composed of sentences of less than 15 words.

Common usage of words - wherever possible.

PROJECT FUTURE

Building Community Through People

SAMPLE COMMUNITY VISIONS

DEVELOPED BY COMMITTEES

NOTE: These future visions were prepared for illustrative purposes only. They are examples of the type of vision that could be described AFTER AN EXTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS THAT REACHES AT LEAST 50% OF THE COUNTY'S RESIDENTS.

East Lake County in 1999

(formerly Silver Bay) - ONE VISION

August 1988

Silver Bay 11 years from today is a different community! The most noticeable difference is in the attitude of community residents. They don't expect Reserve Mining or anyone else "to take care of them". The company town mentality doesn't exist anymore!

The "new" Silver Bay attitude has led to numerous changes. There is even a new logo and a new mascot. "Rocky Taconite" has been retired to the historical museum. There is new housing for persons of all ages. There are numerous small businesses both recruited by the community and started by community residents who caught the entrepreneurial spirit.

Community boundaries have expanded as residents of Beaver Bay, East Beaver Bay, Finland, Silver Bay, and Isabella all think of themselves as really one community. Many civic, youth, cultural and recreational organizations which were previously organized around city boundaries are now East Lake County organizations. The churches are more active in the community than in the past and have also adopted an East Lake County approach in euchumenical programs.

The lifestyle in East Lake County continues to be low key with acceptance of widely diverged lifestyles. The crime rate is the lowest in the state. This lifestyle is especially attractive to many self employed artists and craftspersons who have moved into the area. East Lake County is beginning to acquire a New England "feel" to it. The community lifestyle has expanded in the options it provides its citizens. A wide range of recreational programs exist for adults including the opportunity to compete against adults from throughout the Midwest who come to Silver Bay for sporting competitions. The varied interests of teenagers has been reflected in the development of a teen center and skate board and biking facilities. Young tourists often stop to use these facilities as well which is establishing a new dimension to tourism. "Pack the Skateboard When You Come to the North Shore" is a minor but still significant advertising approach in the nationwide advertising that East Lake County does to promote itself. East Lake County has - as the TV spots in Chicago say - much to offer visitors and tourists. There is a "gem" of a boat marina with a close by hotel with meeting facilities. A "world class" restaurant features fish from Lake Superior and elsewhere. Fresh fish can be purchased daily at the restaurant and at several other locations throughout East Lake County. Many of the restaurant patrons come from the excursion train which runs daily from Duluth to Silver Bay. Those train riders are also attracted by the vibrant summer theatre offered in East Lake County both in the high school auditorium and sometimes under a tent or even under the stars. There is also a series of local festivals happening from June to September in East Lake County. Sitting in the middle of Silver Bay is a tourist paradise of a shopping center which includes the Sterling Art Gallery featuring local artists and others, The Silver Platter Restaurant which is superb in its menu variety and affordability, the Quicksilver Pharmacy perhaps the most complete pharmacy on the North Shore, several clothing stores and a variety of other shops catering to year-round residents. It is on rare occasion that grumbling is heard among citizens or tourists about the lack of shopping in East Lake

-further upgrading of highway 61 to assist both tourism and the shipping of manufactured goods from companies in the Silver Bay Industrial Park. The Citizen Action Team will continue to work with other North Shore communities in a unified effort.

-examining the East Lake County lifestyle to see if it has retained its low key nature and openness to newcomers. "We don't want to be like 'Minneapolis'", said one committee member in proposing the study.

The Chair of the East Lake County Community Renewal Association summarized the thoughts of many association members, some of whom were original members of the Project Future Steering Committee in 1988 - the predecessor of the Association.

1. We are a cohesive community and as a result we can get a lot done that would never happen if we went our own way.

2. We are an active, involved community that doesn't rest on its accomplishments but keeps working. This is not couch potato country!

3. WE HAVE PRIDE IN OUR COMMUNITY! Pride in not just having survived, or turned things around but pride in creating the kind of community we all really wanted! We are not only a community worth visiting but a community worth living in!

4. The state and the world will hear more from East Lake County in the future. By 2010, there will be a Governor in St. Paul who comes from East Lake County, then the White House! The future is ours!

The Vice Chair from Finland and the Secretary from East Beaver Bay led the audience in a standing ovation for the Chairperson who is scheduled to graduate from high school next spring and was formerly an outstanding leader in the Pine Cone Kickers 4-H Club.

(Vision based on brainstorming ideas of the East Lake County Project Future Steering Committee on August 17, 1988)

NOTE: This future vision of East Lake County was prepared for illustrative purposes only. It is an example of the type of vision that could be described AFTER AN EXTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS THAT REACHES AT LEAST 50% OF THE COUNTY'S RESIDENTS.

has led to continuing and growing cooperation between all the area churches. Communication between people couldn't be better and a one time "standoffish" attitude toward newcomers is long gone.

Lamberton, Minnesota doesn't know what the future will bring but all its citizens are ready to take it on - together!

NOTE: This future vision of Lamberton, Minnesota was prepared for illustrative purposes only. It is an example of the type of vision that could be described AFTER AN EXTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS THAT REACHES AT LEAST 50% OF THE COUNTY'S RESIDENTS.

county wide tours for visitors, community festivals almost too many to mention throughout the year and 75 bed and breakfasts establishments.

In differing ways, visitors say "this is really an attractive community" or "this is really a beautiful place to live" and Sibley residents work hard at making those statements true. There is an outstanding county wide recycling program and no contaminated water in Sibley County and a lot of other communities wish they could say the same. The word has spread about Sibley County and there are several artists colonies scattered through the county. There is an ever growing cultural life stimulated by a county wide arts council. Fewer cars leave Sibley County for concerts and plays in the Twin Cities these days and several outdoor concerts each summer in Sibley County result in near bumper to bumper traffic on highways 19, 196 and 5 - which incidentally could still use some work.

Sibley people do more than polka as shown by their extensive park system and extensive recreation leagues. All lakes in the county are fully developed for recreational uses. With so much to stay home for including some of the best ethnic restaurants in Minnesota, Sibley County people are not afraid to travel for pleasure and business. An innovative transportation program helps Sibley residents work in metropolitan industries and minimize their joint travel time. There are frequent tours to many regional centers - most within 1 1/2 hours of Sibley - and "new" ideas as well as good memories are brought back. "They are a pro-active sort", noted more than one Mankato resident with more than a little concern in his voice.

But it is the calm and sane approach to life that's most noticeable about Sibley County people. Decisions get made with open community discussion. Family, school and church are still major priorities for most residents. Numerous options exist not only for day care services but through an innovative foundation funded program, some Sibley County mothers are paid to stay home with their children. There are also numerous options available to most residents including good paying jobs - with flexible benefit packages - in a full employment economy. The technology of the "Information Age" is being wisely used by businesses and residents of Sibley County and most residents have more leisure time than in the past.

But Sibley County people are not resting on their accomplishments. They are sensitive to the possibility of the County developing an East-West split and the fact that their community institutions have to change with the time. Each community goes out of its way to learn about other cities in the County. Schools and churches have consolidated as needed but that's "okay" with the people. Whatever needs to be done, they'll do it - but nobody will do it for them.

That's Sibley County in the year 2010, a blend of the "best" of the past with a strategic response to future change. The result - the best place to live in Minnesota! Just ask any of those 25,000 citizens - or is it 30,000 by now.

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